

William Rotch, Jr. House (Mariners' Home)
15 Johnny Cake Hill (formerly Bethel Street)
New Bedford
Bristol County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-679

HABS
MASS,
3-NEBED,
13-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Division of Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

WILLIAM ROTCH, JR. HOUSE (MARINERS' HOME)

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Address: 15 Johnny Cake Hill (formerly Bethel Street),
New Bedford, Bristol County, Massachusetts.
/Latitude 41° 38' 08" North, longitude 70°
55' 26" West/ Formerly located at the south-
west corner of William and Water Streets.

Present Owner: New Bedford Port Society, New Bedford, Massachusetts

Present Occupant: Mariners, under management of Port Society

Present Use: Rooming house

Brief Statement of Significance: The home of an early prominent New Bedford Quaker merchant, one of the oldest remaining in the city; now a local landmark.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built for William Rotch, Jr.; on his death in 1850 it passed into possession of his daughter Sarah, wife of James Arnold, who then presented it to the New Bedford Port Society after it was moved to the present site. /"Old Dartmouth," pp. 214, 340/

2. Date of erection: About 1790 or 1800 /ibid./ A sign on the front of the structure bears the date 1787.

3. Notes on alterations and additions: Moved about 200 feet, from its original site, about 1850 /ibid./

Apparently finish flooring added throughout first floor; mantel altered in southeast parlor; fireplace removed in northeast parlor /from observation/.

4. Important old views and references:

Undated stereo pair, unnamed photographer, in possession of the New Bedford Free Public Library, shows a railing around the top, at the edge of the roof (this photograph is titled "Seamen's Bethel and Mariners' Home, Johnnycake Hill").

Worth, Palmer and Austin, "Old Dartmouth," a manuscript in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, Johnny Cake Hill, New Bedford, Mass. This consists of photographs of houses and public buildings in New Bedford, Fairhaven, Acushnet, Dartmouth and Westport; photographs by Fred W. Palmer, introduction and notes by Henry B. Worth, "done into shape" by Emma C. Austin; dated September, 1907.

- B. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated: Record of the New Bedford Port Society might yield more information on recent repairs, etc.

"Correspondence of William Rotch," in the Old Dartmouth Historical Society, New Bedford, Massachusetts, contains references to this building.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: A large, but unpretentious well built house of the end of the 18th century, with well preserved original wood features. Representative of the architecture of wealthy Quakers of the area.
2. Condition of fabric: Sound and well maintained.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: Approximately 51' front (five bays) x 44' deep. Fronts east. Three stories.
2. Foundations: Roughly squared granite; about 5' high above grade. (Presumably built when house was moved about 1850)
3. Wall construction: East and west walls of wood frame; narrow lapped siding, 3" exposure, end joints feathered; corner boards. North and south walls painted brick, Flemish bond. Brick string courses at floor levels. It is doubtful whether these brick walls were built when the house was moved, or whether they were original.
4. Stoops: Stoop at entrance, with granite steps at each side, iron railing.
5. Chimneys: Originally two chimneys at each side; two now visible above roof, near front.
6. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Main entrance on center of front; frontispiece with Roman Doric pilasters, pediment, transom light.
 - b. Windows: Double hung sash, six lights over six lights (except eight lights over eight lights on third floor). Windows in brick walls have flat arch, soldier course, at head; those in wooden walls have heavy, simple trim, with crown moulding over.

7. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Hipped, presently covered with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice: Box cornice with mouldings. Formerly surmounted by a railing.
- c. Dormers, cupolas: None.

C. Technical Description of Interior: (only the first story is described here; items mentioned appear original unless otherwise stated.)

1. Floor plans: Central entrance hall with stairway, and central back hall with secondary stairway. Two rooms on each side of hall.
2. Stairways: Open; 12 risers to landing, five risers above. Newel has square and turned portions, moulded handrail has lower sweep hand formed from single block. Two turned balusters per tread. Back stairway enclosed.
3. Flooring: Covered with modern narrow flooring boards.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster, some painted and some papered. Northeast room has modern composition board ceiling.
5. Doorways and doors: six-panel, moulded
6. Trim: (Wood) typically moulded cornice, two piece architrave trim on doors and windows, wainscoting of horizontal boards, interior paneled shutters. Natural finish in northeast room, painted in others. East wall furred, creating wide window reveals.

Southwest room appears to preserve original fireplace and over-mantel treatment. Whole chimney projection is framed by wood moulding; fireplace opening framed with wood architrave moulding, one panel above, then a wood mantel shelf; over-mantel has one large panel. In the southeast room the treatment is similar, with a marble mantel and hearth added, and an iron fire frame.

7. Hardware: A number of doors, particularly those of the northeast room, have wrought iron HL hinges, two hung on leaf pintles.
8. Lighting: Modern electric fixtures. No indication of original lighting.

9. Heating: Originally by fireplaces; the two on south side were described above. The one in the northeast room has been blocked up and mantel altered somewhat. The one in the northwest room (kitchen) is very large; it is now blocked up, but appears to have had an oven alongside.

There is a modern central heating system now.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: The original site was on a corner; the present one is very small, in the middle of a block. The house faces east; apparently it faced south before being moved. The neighborhood is closely built up, near the old waterfront.
2. Enclosures: Presently there is a wooden balustrade across the front, with low wooden gateposts. A wooden picket fence encloses part of the south side, at the front between the sidewalk and the church which adjoins this property to the south.
3. Landscaping: Very simple planting.

Prepared by Harley J. McKee, Architect
National Park Service
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